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Law and Order Committee receives report on law enforcement and criminal justice programs at Navajo Technical University and Diné College

CROWNPOINT, N.M. – On Monday, the Law and Order Committee received a report on law enforcement and criminal justice programs currently offered at Navajo Technical University and Diné College, and discussed the development of a public safety program to train Navajo Nation police officers.

According to the report provided by the Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety director John Billison, the recruitment and training process for potential Navajo Nation police officers has raised some challenges, especially the intellectual portion of police training, which includes reading and writing skills.

“Currently, our recruitment process is not a problem and we have many candidates applying to the police program,” said Billison. “The recruits pass the physical portion of the police training with flying colors, however, when it comes to the reading and writing portion of the process, many fail the program making it difficult for us to hire more police officers.”

Dr. Elmer Guy, president of Navajo Technical University, said that it is possible to develop a program that would aid in the expansion of the recruits academic and critical thinking skills. He added that there are already existing criminal justice programs available to recruits, however it would be more beneficial to create a program that is specific to the needs of a Navajo Nation police officer.

In agreement, Diné College president Dr. Maggie George added that both educational institutions are open to working together to develop the curriculum to aid in ensuring that recruits have all the necessary skills to be successful law enforcement agents.

LOC member Council Delegate Russell Begaye (Shiprock) advocated for the professional development of Navajo Nation police officers and said that it is essential they be trained to serve at a high level similar to other law enforcement agencies in the U.S.

“We do not want to lower the standards of becoming a police officer,” said Delegate Begaye. “We need to help the recruits succeed in these programs and we can even go as far as creating an

internship program to incubate them, so they can be confident and efficient officers on the Navajo Nation.”

LOC vice chair and former police officer, Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd (Jeddito, Cornfields, Ganado, Kin Dah Lichíí, Steamboat), mentioned that there would be a new Navajo police academy facility built in the community of Chinle in the near future.

“We requested both institutions [NTU and Diné College] here today to discuss what programs you can offer so we can prepare for the new Navajo police academy and improve the recruitment process to increase higher success rates,” said Delegate Shepherd.

LOC chair Council Delegate Edmund Yazzie (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau), who also served as a police officer, added that the curriculum would need to be geared toward the understanding of the unique issues and challenges that Navajo police encounter, in relation to the needs of a tribal reservation and its people.

LOC members voted 3-0 to accept the report.

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